

MEMO

Subject: **Slade's Ferry as Waterfront & Retail Destination**— an interim, local-market-driven, business development concept - DRAFT

To: Jim Burke, Chairman of **Somerset Economic Development Committee**

From: Lloyd Mendes, member, Somerset Economic Development Committee

Date: 19 March 2015



Public Access Fishing & Canoe Portage

Introduction: Slade's Ferry businesses lost drive-by retail traffic when Highway 6 was re-aligned to the new Veteran's Memorial Bridge; some businesses suffered but others thrived.

Customers of destination businesses like Schwartz Appliance, Boot Den, and Magoni's still come: they are not impulse shoppers. We use these successful destination businesses as models and propose to re-purpose and re-brand Slade's Ferry into a family-oriented destination retail district. **Public access fishing & boating** on Town property may attract Fall River families and bolster existing, family-oriented businesses. Customers driving to Slade's Ferry destinations will find the Route 6 access road easier if the Town improves **highway signage**.

Direct bus service from north-end Fall River may attract more shoppers and job seekers to Slade's Ferry and other Rte. 6 retail businesses. New retailers **targeting moderate-income customers** from north-end Fall River and from the Park & Ride lot could complement existing destination businesses with similar customer bases. Development can be started immediately through **low-cost, Town policy changes and local business self-help**, with minimal need for State permits or major private investment.

Caveat: The modest goal of this proposal is modest retail improvement sufficient to keep existing businesses open until major private investment is possible (see Annex 2: Justification).

Assumptions: The Town's fiscal predicament will preclude property acquisition or major infrastructure investments, and the South Coast investment climate will discourage development as a true mall under unified, or nearly unified, ownership. The main source of investment capital and innovation will be local small businesses already committed to the area.



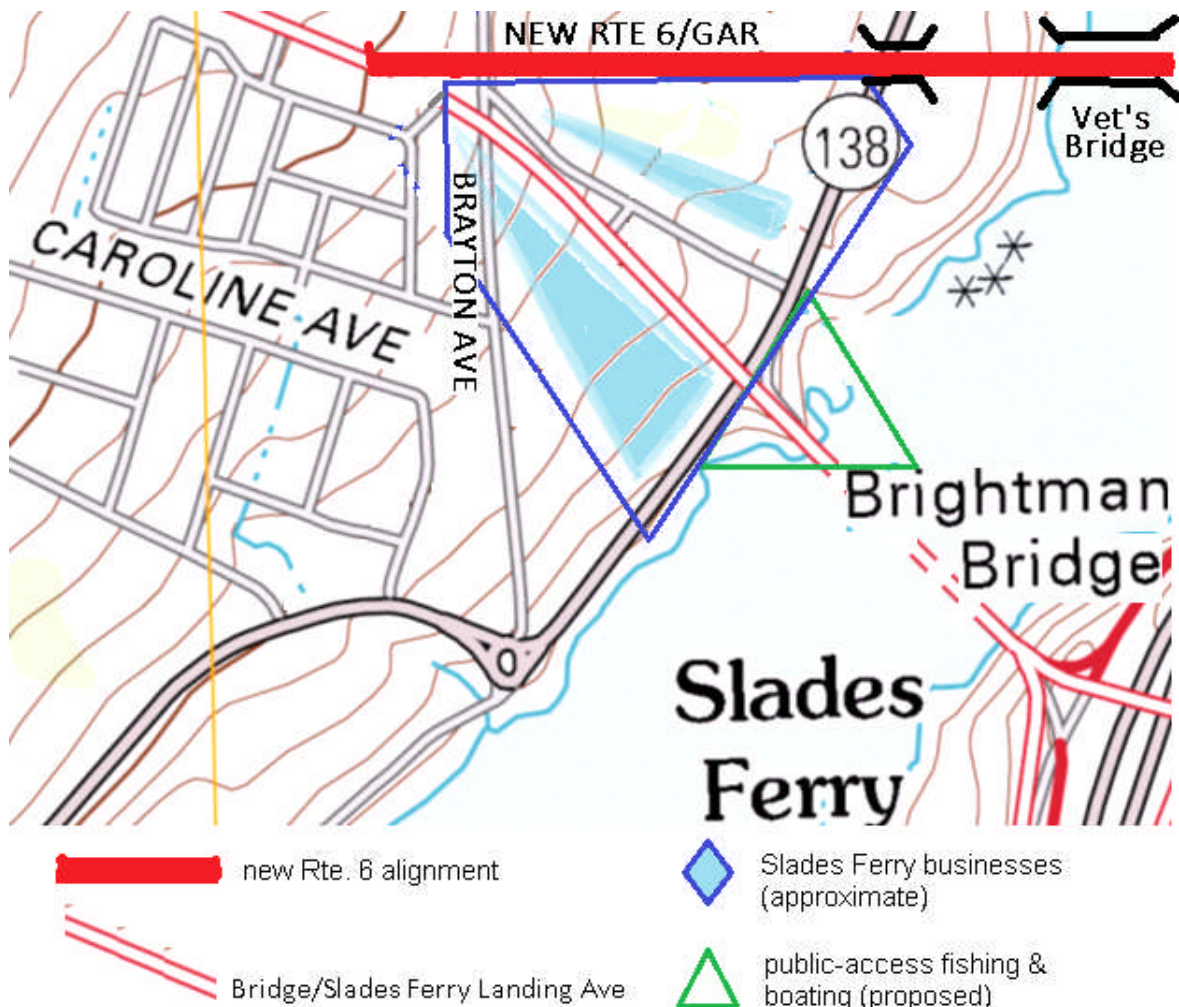
Satellite view of Slade's Ferry business district; note re-alignment of US Highway 6 from Veterans' Memorial Bridge cutting off direct access to Slade's Ferry businesses. Image edited from Route 79/Davol Street Corridor Study, Fall River, MA, Working Group Meeting #2, Mass. Dept. Transportation; <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/abp/projects/Rte79I195.aspx>,

CONCEPT:

- **Public-access fishing & boating** from the waterfront, allowing safe, inexpensive, family-oriented activities and attracting moderate-income families from nearby Fall River:
 - Encourage public recreational fishing from the shoreline of Town-owned property around the Brightman Bridge revetment and encourage the hand-carrying of canoes & kayaks to the waterfront. Lobby for State approval of public access fishing from the disused bridgehead. Longer term, seek State or private funding for a boat ramp and provide mooring slips for small recreational craft.
 - Persuade a local, low-budget fishing & boating retailer (e.g. Benny's) to open a small seasonal shop or tackle wagon resupplied from its main store in Fall River, hoping that retail demand will lead to investment in a permanent store front.
 - Encourage an existing business near the waterfront to sell live bait & adult fishing permits and to rent on-site storage of privately owned canoes and kayaks, hoping that market demand will encourage the sale of small craft;
 - Persuade area businesses to advertise free adult fishing on Massachusetts Free Fishing Weekend (and "grandpa fishing weekends" for free-permit seniors & children season-long) and to organize year-round, low-cost family activities in order to attract the same demographic: ice skating & bonfires, garden & yard

sales, etc. Move the current farmers' market downhill to the historic park and hold flag-raising at the Cemetery on national & state patriotic holidays.

- Encourage existing area restaurants to serve snacks to waterfront users from portable wagons, hoping that profits encourage restaurants to open a waterside satellite snack bar (e.g. The Tippy Seagull at Borden Marina, which is a satellite of the Tippy Toboggan). Persuade area businesses to advertise free restroom use for waterfront users, encouraging walk-in, potential retail traffic.



Topographical map of Slade's Ferry business area with proposed outlines of business development and of public access fishing/boating areas (edited from a pdf of USGS 7.5 minute series, Fall River Quadrangle (2012) Massachusetts-Rhode Island, 1:24,000).

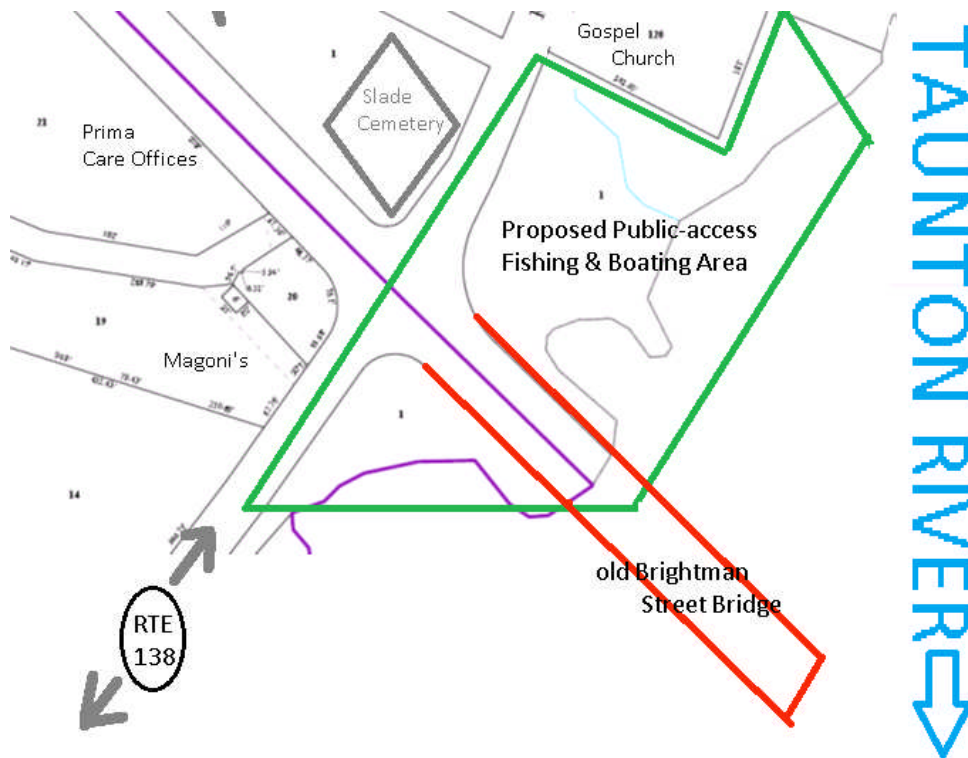
- **Improve visibility of & access** to Slade's Ferry from heavily travelled Route 6.
 - Erect highway signs on Rte. 6 for all Somerset business districts.
 - Re-route SRTA bus #14 through north-end Fall River to boost ridership; advertise free family events & late night supermarket service in north-end Fall River.
 - Acquire State land on Rte. 6 for parking, a mall sign and an open vista from Rte. 6.
- **Support and complement existing destination businesses & activities:**
 - Encourage retailers to serve customers **drawn to existing businesses**:
 - Home furnishing retailers for customers drawn to Schwartz Appliances.
 - Medical services for customers drawn to PrimaCare (e.g. a minimal service pharmacy annex, e.g. Walgreens at 5 Tremont St. in Taunton).
 - Asian food store for Chinese diaspora customers drawn to Asian Buffet.
 - Pool hall for customers drawn to Gridiron, for a sense of vibrant nightlife.
 - Encourage businesses to serve time- and money-constrained **Park & Ride commuters** with conveniently timed services (note: some services will require variances to Zoning by-laws):
 - Breakfast & coffee shop or wagon that operates from 5 a.m. Mon-Sat.).
 - Laundry drop-off wagon, providing same-day service from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m.
 - Pre-school-child day care, accepting children from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Public-access waterfront fishing and (hand-carried) canoeing & kayaking:

- **Site preparation:** Prepare Town waterfront land around disused Brightman Street Bridge for public-access fishing (both sides) and hand-carrying of canoes and kayaks to the waterfront (low-sloping north side only, which is currently zoned as a Park).
- Consult with Division of Marine Fisheries South Shore Field Office, Public Access, Ross Kessler (Ross.Kessler@state.ma.us (508-990-2860 x143)) on the viability of public-access fishing and canoeing at Slade's Ferry
- Town Counsel & Conservation Agent: Advise on legal/liability implications of path clearing and public fishing & boating from the waterfront on Town land.
- Conservation Agent, Recreation Dept. & local fishing association volunteers: Remove litter and briars from access paths of Town-owned land. Exploit natural contours to eliminate need for costly and permit-requiring construction. Post public-access fishing & canoe/kayak portage signs.

- Highway Dept:
 - Place curbside trash receptacles (with "carry-out" signs along waterfront).
 - Post no-parking signs on Riverside Ave, directing users to Park & Ride Lot.
 - Authorize and install a crosswalk and cautionary highway sign to reduce risk.



- Allow low-cost, year-round family activities at Slade's Ferry waterfront & park:
 - Recreation Dept/State Division of Marine Fisheries: Arrange a family-fishing event on the first weekend in June, coinciding with the Commonwealth's Free Fishing Weekend for adults. For Division of Marine Fisheries contacts on Free Fishing Weekend, see: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/pr-pre-p2/pr-2011/free-fishing-weekend.html>. For a similar event in Taunton, see <http://www.enterpriseneews.com/x73586438/Local-briefs-for-May-15?template=printart>
 - Slade's Ferry business self-help for promotion & advertising:
 - Advertise fishing -- permit-free for children and with free permits for seniors -- all summer. Sell state fishing permits to adults.
 - Sponsor year-round, outdoor events: bonfires, ice skating, flag raisings & historical re-enactments at the Historic Cemetery or at complementary businesses (e.g. yard sales at Move-on-Up Thrift store, health screenings at Prima-Care & Angel's, garden sales at Amalia's Nursery).
 - Negotiate promotional offers for families with children carrying fishing gear, ice skates, etc. (e.g. free children's bus fare; free children's snacks).

- Persuade Slade's Ferry retail businesses to provide public use of restrooms in expectation of increased retail trade.
- SEDC: Persuade a low-cost fishing tackle retailer like Benny's to serve Family Fishing Days with a fishing tackle wagon.

Relax zoning requirements for start-up, exploratory businesses:

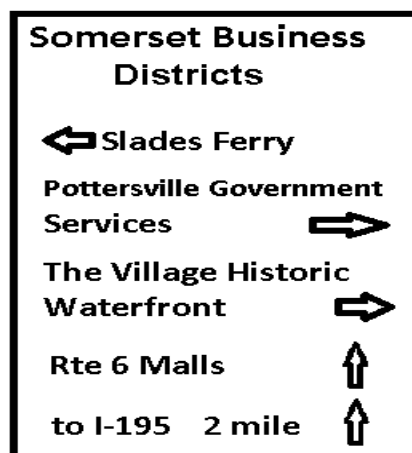
- Town Counsel: Advise on the legality of fishing tackle and food wagons and a preschooler day care serving early morning commuters; advise on by-law revisions.
- SEDC: Market the concepts of seasonal, satellite store-front or service wagons and early-morning commuter services to businesses already invested in the region and with the capacity to support satellite services from existing store fronts, for example:
 - A fishing tackle van supplied by Benny's of Fall River,
 - a laundry drop-off wagon connected to Deiken or Stop & Shop Mall laundries,
 - a coffee truck supplied from nearby restaurants,
 - a waterside satellite snack bar like The Tippy Seagull at Borden Marina in Fall River.
- Building Inspector: Assist businesses seeking zoning variances at Slade's Ferry.

Longer term infrastructure:

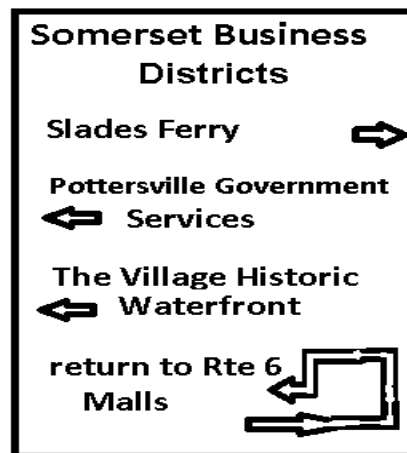
- Selectmen & Harbormaster: Seek state funding for a public-access boat ramp.
- State legislators: Negotiate with State authorities for fishing off Brightman Bridge.

Improve visibility for destination-bound visitors to Slade's Ferry

- Highway signage on Route 6: Erect two major, business-district signs on Route 6 to alert east- and west-bound drivers of the upcoming turns (eastbound: just east of the Home Depot access road; westbound: just west of the Route 138 overpass).



East face of sign on westbound lane of Rte 6, placed just west of Rte 138 overpass

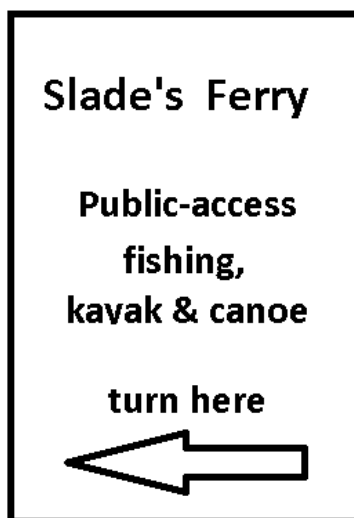


West face of sign on eastbound lane of Rte 6, placed just east of Home Depot traffic lights



Proposed sign locations on Town property to improve visibility of Slade's Ferry business district to drivers on Route 6. Signs are represented by rectangles with a leg indicating placement. Image edited from Route 79/Davol Street Corridor Study, Fall River, cited above.

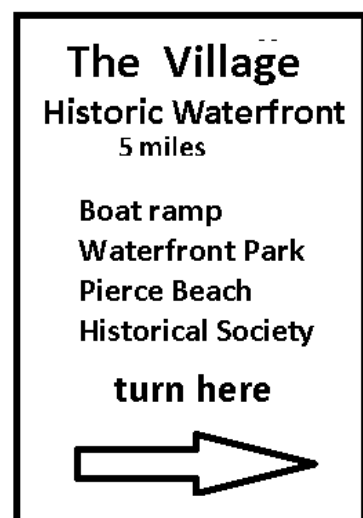
- At the intersection of Brayton Ave and Route 6, erect three signs for Slade's Ferry, Pottersville and The Village business districts. Post only non-commercial destinations but collect costs from private businesses for boosting destination traffic.



East face of 2-sided sign at SW corner of Brayton Ave & Rte 6; west face points in opposite direction

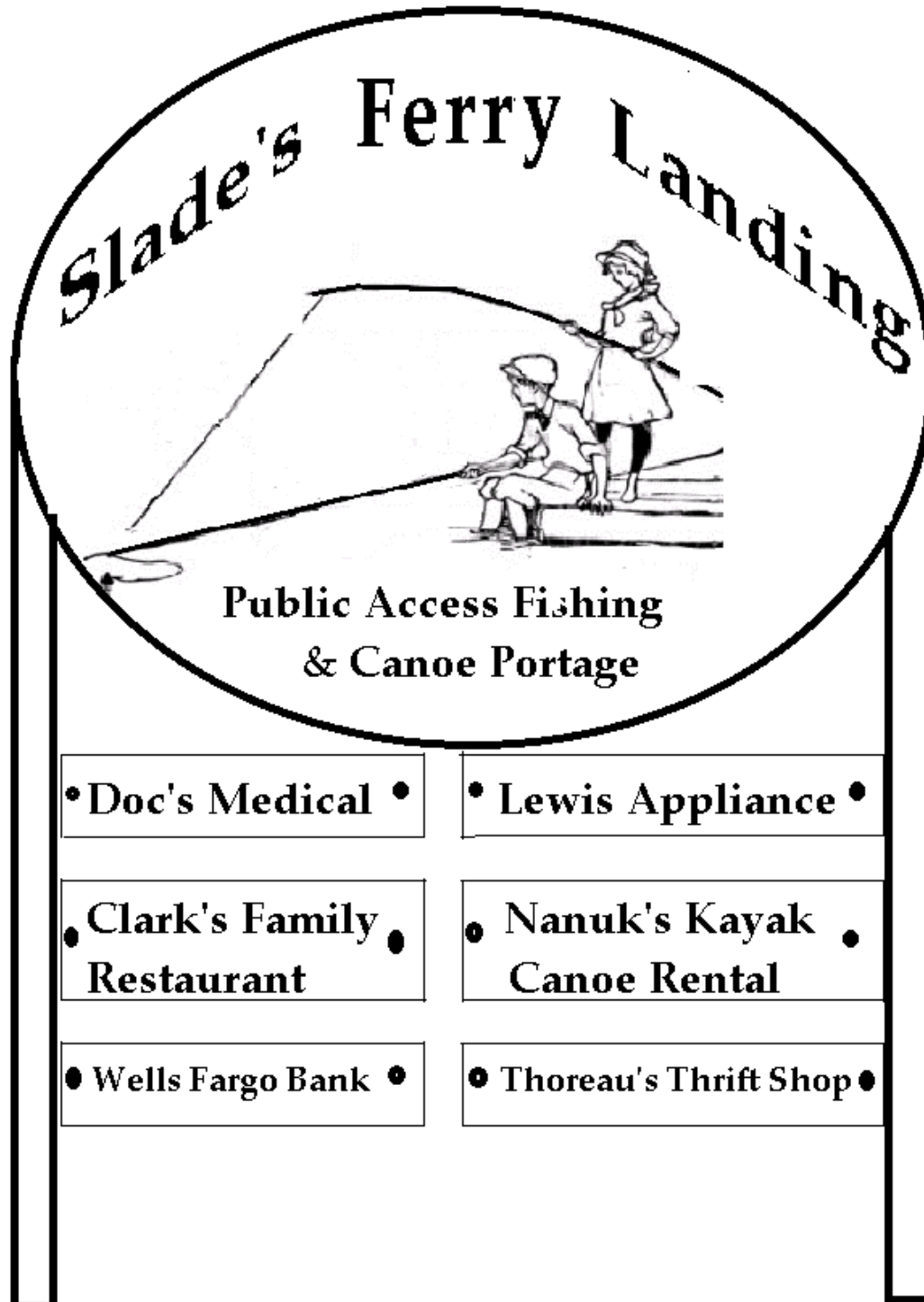


East face of 2-sided sign at NE corner of Brayton Ave & Rte 6; west face points in opposite direction



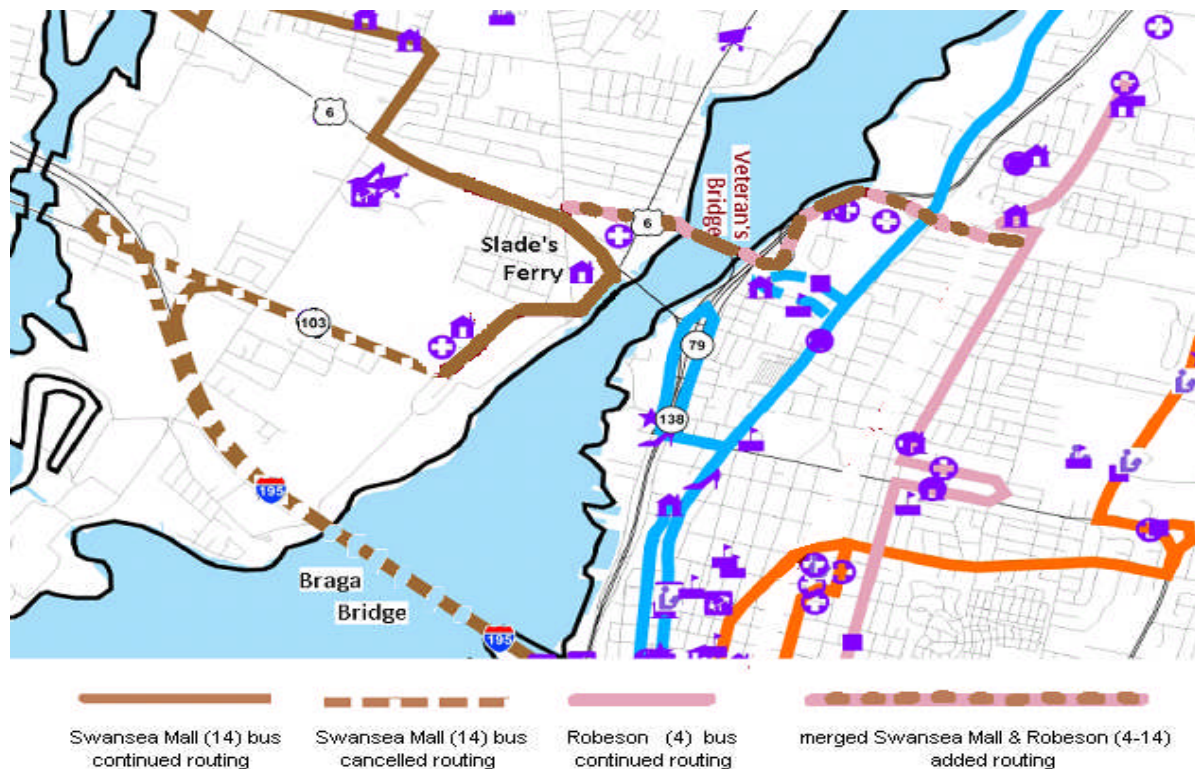
East face of 2-sided sign at NE corner of Brayton Ave & Rte 6; west face points in opposite direction

- Private property signage: Grant a zoning variance to Slade's Ferry businesses for an association mall-like sign on private property (e.g. high ground near Boot Den or Amalia's Nursery) or on the south side of Rte. 6, if state land is ceded to Town.



Encourage more **SRTA bus** ridership for Slade's Ferry and Route 6 businesses:

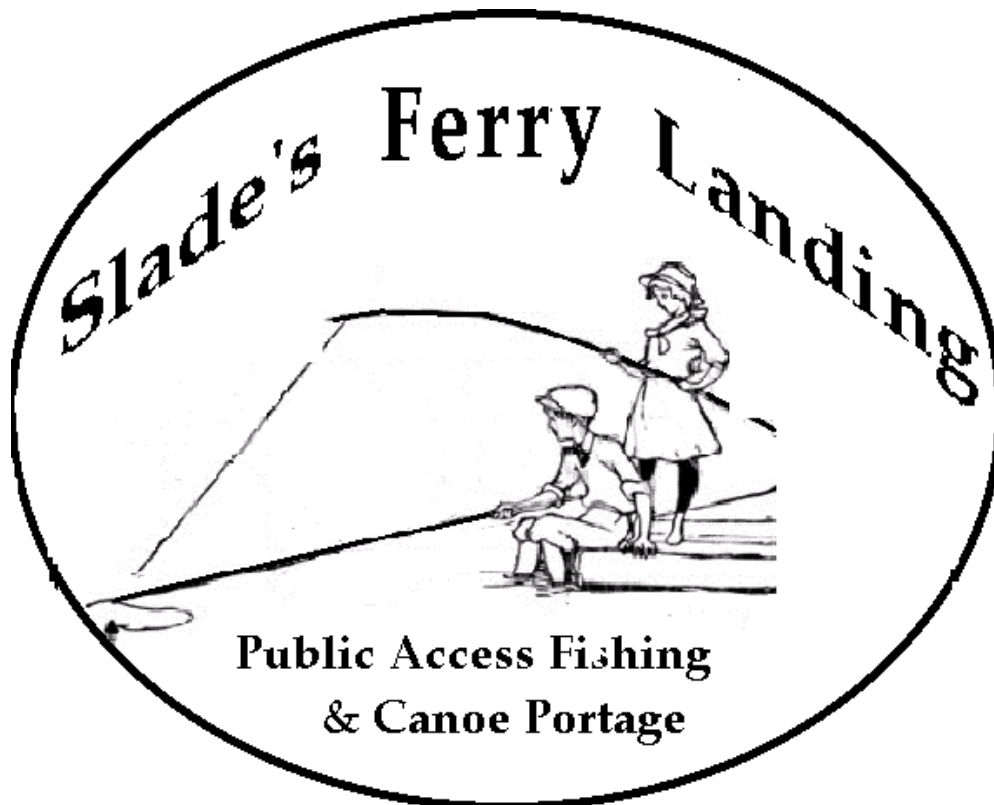
- Petition SRTA to merge SRTA Bus Routes 4 (Robeson) & 14 (Swansea Mall) reverting to the direct service between north-end Fall River and Slade's Ferry provided before the demolition of Brightman Street Bridge (see map below). Re-routing via Veteran's Bridge will cancel Braga Bridge/I-195 and Rte. 103 segments, where few riders board. Because the merged route would contain both congested urban and lengthy suburban segments, completing the merged route within one hour would be difficult, and a two-hour service schedule is recommended, but operating from 6am (Robeson schedule) until 9pm (Swansea Mall schedule). Personnel costs, bus maintenance and fuel use on a merged route (4-14) would decrease significantly while the same public housing, low-income neighborhoods and medical facilities would be served for longer hours. Three public housing areas off Robeson, in addition to the low-income neighborhoods of the lower slopes of the Highlands (US Census-2010 Census Tracts 2091, 3956) would gain late-night supermarket service, a benefit to working families without cars. Highland residents could work at the Route 6 malls and not simply shop there, while Somerset and Swansea commuters could access the Pettine Central Bus Terminal for Providence & Boston commuter busses.



Schematic map of SRTA public transit buses #14 (Swansea Mall Bus) and #4 (Robeson) merged into Route #4-14 (Robeson-Swansea) to link north Fall River riders to Slades Ferry. Caveat: Mapping of proposed route segment in Fall River is notional and must be adjusted by transit experts to fit road, traffic, regulations and demographic data). Map edited from SRTA pdf map, "Fall River Bus Routes" at <http://www.srtabus.com/system-maps>

Public safety: Because the advantage of Slade's Ferry for urban Fall River families is safe, wholesome activities for children, Town Police must boost patrolling at Slade's Ferry, particularly along the heavily wooded, secluded waterfront, where families fish.

Branding: Because the essence of this development of the site is family-oriented waterfront activities, all stakeholders should be encouraged to adopt a uniform, graphic advertising motif of children fishing from the Ferry Landing. The suggested imagery shown below is in the public domain and could be used by a Slade's Ferry business association on a mall-like sign on private property. See: <http://www.prawny.me.uk/media.details.php?mediaID=OTI4YzdkMzVkYmJlYg==>



In this way, the Town may encourage businesses in the area to gradually converge, at their own pace and own expense, into the weathered, traditional New England image envisioned by the Town's Zoning for Slade's Ferry, if they so choose.

NEXT STEPS:

This proposal is still preliminary and must be researched further to assess its viability. In order to research further without presenting the proposal publicly as official policy, the Economic Development Committee asks the Town Administrator to approve discussing the draft plan with State Fisheries officials and with Town offices (e.g. Assessor, Harbormaster, Conservation Agent, etc.) in order to address their suggestions and concerns in a future draft.

If the Selectmen approve the general concept, we will discuss the draft plan with Slade's Ferry businesses, fishing clubs, and SRTA to address their suggestions and concerns in a future draft.

Annex: JUSTIFICATION

Major retail investment unlikely: A recent SRPEDD-funded economic study (Slade's Ferry Crossing Market Feasibility Analysis, 1/16/2015; prepared by Stantec Consulting) showed that major retail investment is unlikely along the South Coast, including Slade's Ferry. The basic problem identified was not cyclical but demographic and is unlikely to change soon. The study considered only macro-economic factors and did not explain why some businesses thrive at Slade's Ferry. It concluded that only subsidized, low-income housing would be profitable at Slade's Ferry. It noted that the existing businesses at Slade's Ferry are "not up to the standards of a modern commercial center." The Study recommended that the Town seek to modernize the area for major commercial investment as waterfront through Master Planning, property consolidation, and subsidized investments, most probably in low-income housing.

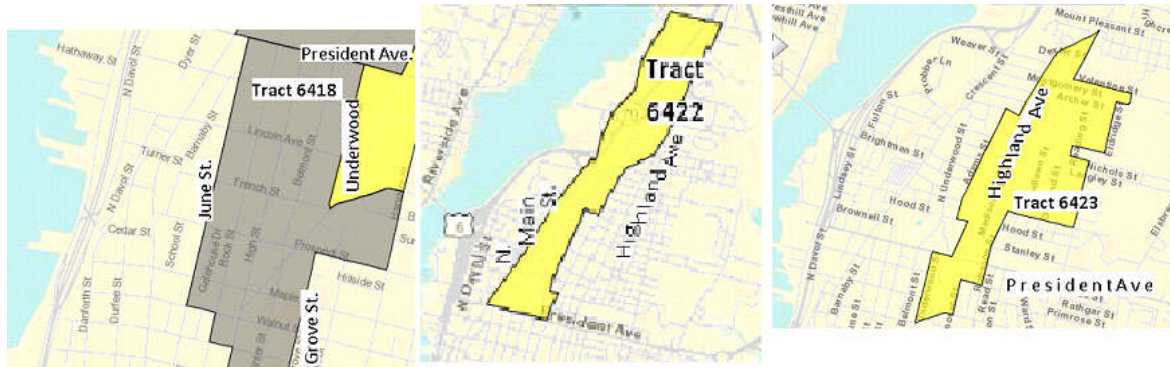
While we welcome the the Stantec analysis, particularly of the demographic constraints to investment on the South Coast in general, we propose a more modest development concept, requiring little Town funding and no Master Planning. We propose to exploit demographics in nearby Fall River by encouraging low-cost activities, services & shopping at Slade's Ferry. This concept is consistent with the current mix of business investment in the area and gives locally invested business people the opportunity and obligation to grow in order to meet the area's business potential. It does not aim to generate huge profits because market analysis has shown that such profits are unattainable at the present time. Our proposal aims only to revitalize the current mix of businesses to keep the area from falling into decay. Our concept does not prevent major commercial development in the future, if the area increases in value and attracts outside investors. Our proposed concept is a low-cost, low-risk interim solution.

Small, modest, destination-business focus: Some destination businesses thrive in this poor macro-economic environment: Magoni's, Gridiron and Asian Buffet restaurants, Schwartz's Appliances, Boot Den, and PrimaCare. These successful businesses are models for other activities at Slade's Ferry which do not depend on drive-by traffic and impulse buying.

Modest-income customer base: North Fall River, particularly the Highlands and neighborhoods at the east end of Veteran's Bridge is home to middle and lower middle class families in low crime neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are restricted from southern Fall River retailers by high-crime North Main Street from President's Ave southward; they are restricted from the western recreational waterfront by Rte. 79. Access to major shopping malls in extreme north and south Fall River is restricted by distance and awkward street access; for shoppers without personal vehicles, city bus service is not direct and, in the Highlands, stops at 5pm. Somerset's Route 6 malls currently hold a customer base from this area. Slade's Ferry businesses might attract more customers this demographic by providing low-cost, family-oriented services.

The SRPPD economic analysis identified a low median household income (\$35,239) for Fall River's 88,472 residents which might indeed deter large retail investors. However, a closer look at US Census data for 2010 shows that the 30, 287 residents of north Fall River (ZIP Code area 02720) have a median annual household income of \$41,910, which is the highest of the City's urban neighborhoods. Looking even closer at the neighborhoods in the Highlands that would be served by the proposed change to SRTA bus #14 (the areas surveyed in Census tracts 6418,

6422, and 6423; see maps below) have median household incomes of \$44,844, \$39,137, and \$75,313 for subpopulations of, respectively, 2091, 3956 & 2313.



Low-cost recreational fishing & boating focus: The combination of moderate incomes and children in nearby Fall River suggests attracting retail customers by offering low-cost family events. Using the three, above-cited Census tracts as the target population, children aged 5-17 comprise, respectively, 14.5, 14.4 and 9.9% of the population; households with children under 18 years comprise 31.3, 26.5 and 19.2% of all households (see <http://factfinder.census.gov>).

Highway signage to improve visibility and access to Slade's Ferry: Highway 6 is heavily travelled. A recent traffic study (see below) by Massachusetts DOT estimated 1,324 vehicles westbound and 1,048 eastbound on Veteran's Bridge during peak afternoon traffic hours. It is likely that this afternoon traffic includes approximately 700 Rte. 6 mall shoppers, because morning peak traffic – presumably mostly commuters – is only half the afternoon flow.



Traffic volume annotated aerial photograph, edited from Route 79/Davol Street Corridor Study, Fall River, MA, Working Group Meeting #2, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, 6 Dec. 2012; www.massdot.state.ma.us/abp/projects/Rte79I195.aspx.

Longer term, organic growth from small, low-cost, exploratory retail efforts: By allowing low-cost, low-risk retail experiments (e.g. a seasonal fishing tackle shop; a breakfast wagon) to explore the area's profit-generating potential, the Town may attract longer-term permanent investment by these same retailers or their competitors.

No major Town investment is justified: Recent economic analysis shows that major private investment, and therefore major profitability and tax revenue, are unlikely from Slade's Ferry, not only now but in the foreseeable future. The only justification for developing the site is to support local livelihoods and protect the area from falling into decay. Since little extra tax-revenue will accrue from investing in Slade's Ferry, Town investment is not recommended. The Town should certainly seek Representative Haddad's and Senator Rodrigues' help for State funding of a boat ramp, but Sen. Rodrigues warns that such funding has a long waiting list ("7-10 years") and therefore, the Town should do what it can on its own now to attract waterfront users without waiting for State funding. State Legislators may be of more immediate help in exploring the transfer of small slivers of State property bordering Route 6 to the Town and allowing public access fishing from the old, disused Brightman Street Bridge.

Avoid lengthy permitting: Minimal disturbance is recommended for the public access waterfront. State permits are stringent and time-consuming for any waterfront construction, but the Town can make the waterfront immediately useful without "turning a spade." The Town's property to the north of Brightman Street Bridge has a gentle slope to a sandy waterfront sufficient for hand-carried canoes and kayaks. It can be made accessible for fishing, canoeing and kayaking by simply clearing narrow paths through greenbrier and bramble bushes; no cutting of trees is needed. While canoers and kayakers discover and popularize Slade's Ferry, the Town can begin the lengthy permitting process to build a ramp for larger, vehicle-drawn boats.

Similarities and differences with previous planning for Slade's Ferry Mixed Use Area: Like the development concept behind the recently approved zoning by-law, this minimalist proposal depends on recreational users drawn to waterfront amenities. Unlike the Zoning concept, this plan does not assume the displacement of current businesses by larger national retail chains: The family-oriented recreational users attracted to the site are expected to reinforce existing businesses (e.g. the recreation- and blue-collar-labor-focused Bootden, home-improvement-oriented Schwartz Appliance and Amalia's Garden Nursery). Unlike the Slade's Ferry Zoning concept, this plan does not impose an aesthetic ideal, but targets a specific demographic customer base and only then introduces an aesthetic concept to support the economic model. Unlike the SRPEDD consultant's market analysis of Slade's Ferry, this plan seeks to base development on the existing demographics in nearby Fall River: families with modest incomes, and time-constrained, car-pooling commuters.

Disclaimer: The proposed minimalist strategy is not intended to replace tax revenue from the power plant at Brayton Point. It is intended only to help keep Slade's Ferry store fronts occupied and in business, until more ambitious, profit-making investors can be attracted.